

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSM-03 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01 IO-13 /073 W
-----190953Z 113673 /21

R 181435Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5321
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION SINAI

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 1956

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: IS, EG, PFOR
SUBJECT: MEETING WITH GAZA MAYOR RASHED SHAWWA

SUMMARY: GAZA MAYOR TAKES A HRD-LINE ON A WEST BANK/GAZA
STRIP STATE. HE HAS ACCEPTED AN EGYPTIAN INVITATION TO
VISIT CAIRO. END SUMMARY

1. GAZA MAYOR RASHED SHAWWA USED THE OCCASION OF A CALL
ON HIM MARCH 17 BY AN EMBOFF AND A VISITING DEPARTMENT
OFFICER TO EXPRESS HIS VIEWS ONAN OVERALL SETTLEMENT OF
THE ARAB-ISRAELI PROBLEM. AFTER MENTIONING THE INITIAL
REACTION AMONG GAZA ARABS TO THE FRESH NEWS OF PRESIDENT
CARTER'S REMARKS ON A "PALESTINIAN HOMELAND"--WHICHHE
SAID WAS SERVING TO REDRESS THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF CARTER'S
EARLIER STATEMENT ABOUT "DEFENSIBLE BORDERS"--SAWWA
WENT ON TO SAY THAT THERE ARE TWO POSSIBILITIES FOR THE
FUTURE OF THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES. THE FIRST IS THAT
ISRAEL WOULD ANNEX THE WEST BANK AND THE GAZA STRIP,
A "SOLUTION" WHICH THE PEOPLE IN THE ARAB STATES
WOULD NEVER ACCEPT AND WHICH WOULD LEAD TO WAR IN
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THE NEXT FEW YEARS. THE SECOND POSSIBILITY, HE SAID,
WAS THAT SOME KIND OF A PALESTNIAN STATE WOULD BE
ESTABLISHED ON THE WEST BANK AND GAZA,BUT THIS
"SOLUTION"WOULD ALSO NOT FINALLY RESOLVE THE DIFFER-
ENCES BETWEEN THE PALESTINIANS AND ISRAEL, ALTHOUGH
IT MIGHT PERMIT A PEROD OF "PEACE"FOR 10 OR 15
YEARS OR EVEN 50 YEARS--IF THE ISRAELIS MADE A SERIOUS

EFFORT TO TRY TO LIVE WITH THE ARABS NEVERTHELESS, THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SUCH A STATE WOULD STILL LEAVE UNRESOLVED GRIEVANCES AMONG THE PALESTINIANS AND THESE WOULD AGAIN INEVITABLY LEAD TO WAR AT SOMETIME IN THE FUTURE.

2 "IF I PERSONALLY WERE INVITED TO GENEVA TO SIGN A PEACE AGREEMENT WITH THE ISRAELIS ON THE BASIS OF SUCH A STATE AND WITH THE SECURITY GUARANTEES THAT ISRAEL WANTS AND WITH OPEN BORDERS AND ALL THE REST OF IT, I WOULD NOT SIGN IT," HE SAID. ASKED WHY NOT, HE SAID THE BITTERNESS WHICH THE PALESTINIANS HAVE AGAINST THE ISRAELIS IS TOO DEEP FOR THE U.S. TO UNDERSTAND, AND HE WENT INTO STORIES OF HIS PERSONAL GRIEVANCES AGAINST THE ISRAELIS (HE HAD LOST THOUSANDS OF DUNAMS OF LAND TO ISRAEL IN 1948, ETC.). ASKED HIS VIEW OF AN ACCEPTABLE SOLUTION, THE MAYOR REPLIED THAT REALISTICALLY WE WOULD PROBABLY HAVE TO BEGIN WITH A STATE IN THE TERRITORIES OCCUPIED IN 1967, BUT WHAT IS NEEDED FOR A LONG-TERM SOLUTION IS "A CONSOLIDATED PALESTINIAN ARAB STATE" (NEXT TO A JEWISH STATE SMALLER THAN THAT IN 1967). "COUNT BERNADOTTE WAS MURDERED BY THE JEWS BECAUSE HE PROPOSED GIVING THE NEGEV TO THE PALESTINIANS, WHICH WOULD HAVE RESULTED IN SUCH A CONSOLIDATED STATE," THE MAYOR CONTENDED.

3. IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS, SHAWWA MITIGATED SOMEWHAT THE HARSHNESS OF HIS STATEMENTS AND SAID THAT THE CONFIDENTIAL

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U.S., AS THE NUMBER ONE POWER IN THE WORLD, HAS THE DUTY TO IMPOSE A SETTLEMENT ON THE ARABS AND THE ISRAELIS (WHICH WOULD NOT BE ENTIRELY ACCEPTABLE TO EITHER OF THEM) AND THEN "WE WILL HAVE TO TRY TO MAKE IT WORK." AS FOR THE TIES BETWEEN ANY PALESTINIAN STATE AND JORDAN, THE MAYOR SAID THAT ECONOMIC REALITIES DICTATE THAT POLITICAL ARRANGEMENTS BETWEEN THEM WOULD HAVE TO BE MADE. "THE ONLY THING THE ISRAELIS WILL BUY FROM THE ARABS IS CHEAP LABOR. EVEN NOW, THE WEST BANK IS EXPORTING ALMOST ITS ENTIRE PRODUCTION TO THE EAST BANK AND IMPORTING FROM ISRAEL WHAT IT CONSUMES. AND EVERYBODY KNOWS THAT THE GAZA CITRUS ECONOMY DEPENDS ON THE MARKETS WHICH JORDAN AFFORDS." THE MAYOR SAID HE DID NOT RULE OUT THAT SOME DAY KING HUSSEIN MIGHT JUST GET TIRED OF FUSSING WITH THE PALESTINIANS AND ABDICATE.

4. GAZA CITY MANAGER ISAM SHAWWA, WHO SAT IN ON THE DISCUSSIONS, SUBSEQUENTLY EXPLAINED THAT THE MAYOR'S

SURPRISINGLY HARD-LINE REMARKS WERE PARTIALLY ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE FIRM POSITIONS CURRENTLY BEING TAKEN AT THE PALESTINIAN NATIONAL COUNCIL. THE MAYOR, HE IMPLIED, WAS RIDING WITH THE CURRENT. HE ADDED THAT THE MAYOR IS ONE OF A DECREASING NUMBER OF OLD-GENERATION PALESTINIANS WHO PERSONALLY REMEMBER THE DEPRIVATIONS THEY SUFFERED AT THE HANDS OF THE JEWS AND THAT THESE PEOPLE COULD NOT BE EXPECTED EVER TO FORGET OR TO FORGIVE COMPLETELY. ON THE OTHER HAND, PALESTINIANS WHO HAD NOT EXPERIENCED SUCH EVENTS FIRST-HAND (HE COMPARED HIMSELF WITH HIS FATHER) WERE MORE REALISTIC, AND WOULD ACCEPT REASONABLE COMPENSATION FOR THEIR LOSSES.

5. ON OTHER SUBJECTS, ISAM SHAWWA SAID THE MAYOR HAD ACCEPTED THE INVITATION TO VISIT CAIRO (SEE TEL AVIV 1515) AND THAT HE WOULD BE THERE NOW IF THE PNC WERE CONFIDENTIAL

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NOT THERE. HE ADDED THAT LAST WEEK THE EGYPTIAN AMBASSADOR IN AMMAN HAD SENT THE MAYOR AN OFFICIAL LETTER (CONCERNING TRAVEL OF GAZA STUDENTS TO EGYPT VIA JORDAN), "THE FIRST TIME THE EGYPTIANS HAD DONE SUCH A THING." HE DENIED THAT THE MAYOR'S INVITATION TO CAIRO WOULD IN ANYWAY UPSET HIS RELATIONS WITH KING HUSSEIN, SAYING "THE KING KNOWS ABOUT IT."

6. ISAM SHAWWA ALSO SAID THAT SOME ISRAELI OFFICIALS HAD BEEN GOING AROUND IN GAZA ASKING PEOPLE IF THEY REALLY WANTED VARIOUS MEMBERS OF THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL TO REMAIN IN OFFICE. THE ISRAELIS WERE TRYING TO UNDERCUT THE MAYOR BY WEAKENING THE COUNCIL ("JUST LIKE THE EGYPTIANS DID YEARS AGO WHEN MY FATHER WAS MAYOR--THEY BOUGHT OFF THE COUNCIL, THEN DISBANDED THE MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT AND THREW MY FATHER IN JAIL."). BUT THE MAYOR HAD CALLED TOGETHER ALL THE MUKHTARS AND TOLD THEM THAT IF ANYONE STARTED PLAYING THE ISRAELIS' GAME, HE WOULD RESIGN AND THEY WOULD AGAIN HAVE AN ISRAELI RUNNING THINGS, SHAWWA SAID.

7. COMMENT: THE MAYOR WAS MORE BLUNT THAN WE HAVE EVER SEEN HIM. HE SAID SEVERAL TIMES "I COULD TELL YOU THAT A WEST BANK/GAZA STATE WOULD BE FINE," BUT I'M TELLING YOU EXACTLY WHAT I FEEL. "IT WOULD SEEM THAT HE WISHES TO GET A FIRM POSITION ON RECORD BEFORE ANY POTENTIAL NEGOTIATIONS START.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: WEST BANK, MAYOR, PERSONAL OPINION, POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, PEACE PLANS
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Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
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Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
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From: TEL AVIV
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Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
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Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3060966
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MEETING WITH GAZA MAYOR RASHED SHAWWA SUMMARY: GAZA MAYOR TAKES A HRD-LINE ON A WEST BANK/GAZA STRIP STATE. HE HAS ACCEPTED AN EGYPTIAN INVITATIO
TAGS: PFOR, PDEV, IS, EG, (SHAWWA, RASHED)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/96a35cb5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009